

KEY ISSUES FOR RIO PLUS 20

The focus and mandate of the conference is to review and recommit to sustainable development.

- This is the primary political question that must be resolved – will Governments recommit to the Rio Principles – if they don't the conference will be a failure for a vision of sustainable development based on equity and justice.
- This is the theme of the conference agreed by the UN resolution establishing Rio+20
- Discussions on new initiatives cannot 'crowd out' the need to get the basics right and to use the principles already agreed.
- Governments must recognise the multiple crises – of ecological limits, of inequality, of constraints on social development – to prepare for a holistic and integrated response.
- Governments must acknowledge gaps in meeting their existing commitments and redouble their efforts to meet already agreed objectives.
- Moves by rich countries to ignore the multiple crises and their existing commitments reveal the lack of political will in the North to make the changes we need for the future we want.

Reaffirming commitments to the Rio principles and to Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) is essential to preserve the global partnership on sustainable development

- The Rio Declaration from 1992 outlines a comprehensive vision for how international cooperation on sustainable development can be achieved based on equity and rights.
- Any attempt to reject the "Rio Principles" would be to turn our back on:
 - The recognition of historical responsibility by developed countries for their unsustainable patterns of consumption and production;
 - The differentiation of responsibilities between developed and developing countries, based on different contributions to environmental degradation and different capacities to respond;
 - The 'right to development', whose recognition and realisation is essential to billions of people in the world;
 - The prohibition of unilateral trade measures to ensure that rich countries don't further rig trade rules and use 'green' concerns to block emerging industries in the South.
- Developed countries, led by the United States, continue to delete language relating to the CBDR Rio Principle and thus undermine trust in the entire process.

Governments must also reaffirm the right to food, safe drinking water and sanitation, health and education and respect human rights based approaches

- Any outcome from Rio + 20 must reaffirm basic rights to food, safe drinking water and sanitation, health and education that governments have already agreed to. This is fundamental to sustainable development.

- Governments must also respect human rights based approaches to sustainable development and this must not be undermined.
- The rights of indigenous peoples, including to land, water, natural resources, food resources, seeds and their traditions should be recognized.

Existing commitments need to be implemented – the words at this conference must be followed up with by action.

New, additional, predictable and public finance from developed countries is needed:

- As governments make new commitments on sustainable development they must also provide for the realisation of those commitments: new and additional resources – USD 30 billion per year from 2013-2017; US 100 billion per year from 2018 onwards. In fact UN studies show that at least USD 1.9 trillion per year are needed by developing countries for sustainable development actions.
- Rich countries must commit and set clear paths to achieve the internationally agreed ODA ('aid') target of 0.7% of GNP to indicate the seriousness of their engagement in sustainable development.
- Rich countries have an obligation, and have made a commitment, to provide finance and support – they cannot now try and push the effort of cooperation onto “South-South” solidarity actions.
- The private sector cannot generate predictable or sufficient finance for the essential sustainable development actions that are needed – it cannot be made the focus of efforts to mobilize finance.
- A holistic response will include a mechanism for debt crisis prevention.
- International cooperation requires international coordination and this means scaled-up resourcing for the United Nations
- Attractive terms like ‘innovative sources of finance’ are hollow without content – we must have clarity that they will be transparent and from public sources of finance, such as international financial transaction taxes or the issue of Special Drawing Rights; and not unpredictable ‘green bonds’ or ‘offsets’ which commodify natural resources and create complex financial instruments, similar to those which caused the Great Recession in 2008.
- This is a UN forum; therefore reference to the declarations and objectives of OECD or other bodies, such as the “high level forum” on aid effectiveness, should not be imported into the Rio +20 process as they have not been negotiated through a multilateral process

The ‘transfer of technology’ to developing countries to enable sustainable development is an essential element of any outcome and is an existing commitment of developed countries

- Governments have already agreed (in 2002 at the WSSD in Johannesburg) to the transfer of technology on ‘favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms’ and this must not be diluted to appease patent or intellectual property rights holders in the North
- The insertion by rich countries of the terms: “voluntary transfer on mutually agreed terms” is to transform provisions on ‘technology transfer’ into a means for market access for corporations from the North and should be rejected. This amounts to a backtracking from previous commitments made.
- An international mechanism for technology transfer is needed, given the lack of progress on this issue since 1992, and should be a priority outcome from Rio+20
- A holistic approach to sustainable development and particularly to the transfer of technology must address intellectual property rights and the negative effects they can have on sustainable development especially in the area of agriculture, food, health and biodiversity in the South.
- ‘Technology assessment’ allows for the independent determination of the real impacts of technologies on people, communities and the environment and should be a component of an international technology mechanism.

- The need to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to conduct technology assessment is key, especially in the light of new and emerging and potentially risky technologies such as geo-engineering and genetic engineering.

The ‘Green Economy’ cannot be agreed without being defined; and it must be defined in accordance with Rio principles and with the backing of new and additional resources

- ‘Green Economy’ has not been agreed at an international level – there are many different perspectives on what it could mean as a concept.
- It may be a tool for achieving sustainable development for some countries that choose to use its precepts, depending on national circumstances.
- It is not a tool for all countries or an idea to be applied internationally.
- In its elaboration countries must guard against accepting any definition, which leads to the commodification of nature and converts natural systems into ‘services’, which can be traded and exchanged globally through market mechanisms.
- The EU is pushing for the green economy to be stand-alone concept with implementation for all with private sector finance.
- The EU approach must be rejected, the Rio principles reaffirmed, particularly common but differentiated responsibilities, and clarity is required on how international means on implementation (finance, technology or capacity building) will be provided.
- Mechanisms to control and regulate the private sector are vital. The ‘Green Economy’ should not become a vehicle for the ‘Green Economy’ or for ‘green-washing’.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a risk if they are not developed in an open, democratic and transparent manner.

- The job of Rio+20 is not to agree to SDGs, nor to cement every detail of a process to deliver SDGs, but to establish a process.
- In guiding any ongoing SDG process it is essential that existing principles of sustainable development (including particularly CBDR) are acknowledged and applied.
- The SDG process must be inter-governmental, so that all countries get a say in their creation – it should not be ‘hijacked’ by a Secretary-General led process with ‘experts’.
- Such a process must ensure that the MDGs are not sidelined.
- The Rio+20 outcome does not need to ‘list’ initial potential areas for SDGs, this risks ballooning out and becoming unmanageable – the listing should be left to the intergovernmental process dedicated to developing the SDGs.
- If any indication is given to the subject-matter of SDGs, it is crucial that economic aspects are included – such as on ODA levels, financial system reform, reform of the international financial institutions, establishment of mechanisms to prevent external debt crises and debt restructuring, regulation of commodity markets, review of free trade agreements for their negative impacts and a halt to further expansion of such agreements etc. Trade rules are also connected to sustainable development (for example the disputes over subsidies for renewable energy) and so there is a need to review existing trade rules to assess if they contribute to or undermine sustainable development.
- Agreement on a means of ‘monitoring’ or ‘review’ is impossible at this stage, as these will be determined by the content of the SDGs.

Reform of the ‘institutional framework for sustainable development’ must not lose sight of strengthening the effective institutions we already have

- Reform of international institutions for sustainable development cannot focus solely on UNEP and UNEP’s role – ‘the environment’ is only one pillar of sustainable development.
- The institutional framework for sustainable development must address all three pillars of sustainable development in a balanced manner.
- Converting the Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) into a Council under the United Nations is pivotal to IFSD reform, as it would provide a central and well-resourced umbrella organisation, that is responsive to all governments, and that addresses all areas of sustainable development.
- The UNCSD should be upgraded and maintained, pending such reform, and must not be scrapped until a new institutional framework is in place which is the centre of sustainable development.
- Broadening UNEP’s mandate and increasing its resources to allow it to support developing countries in the implementation of their sustainable development agendas would be a positive step forward.
- ECOSOC has a mandated role to play and needs to have its jurisdiction refined to coordinate with an upgraded UNCSD and an expanded UNEP.
- International financial institutions are integral to sustainable development and so their reform, to make them more accountable, responsive and effective, must be on the table in Rio.

New ‘green’ trade barriers cannot become the ‘blocks’ to sustainable development

- Trade issues intersect across all areas of the Rio+20 negotiations and the effects of any agreed measures on trade rules must be considered.
- Agreements in Rio cannot provide a justification for unilateral trade measures – governments cannot be allowed to create undifferentiated ‘standards’ or measures on products merely by making a reference to ‘green’ objectives.
- References to controls and regulation of production must be balanced with controls and changes in the patterns of consumption – sustainable development cannot be achieved without changing consumption patterns and production systems, particularly in the North. The North should lead so that that South can follow.

If governments want to enable sustainable development, then they must regulate transnational corporations who are drivers of unsustainable development.

- Regulation and control of transnational corporations should be a priority for Rio+20 as they are often responsible for some of the worst examples of the exploitation of people and nature in the pursuit of profit.
- A UN global framework, or international binding code, for regulating and disciplining transnational corporations is unfinished business from the original Rio conference; as it was blocked by business interests there.
- References or endorsements of ‘Corporate social responsibility’ (CSR) or improving reporting systems are grossly inadequate – CSR is a voluntary approach run by the corporations themselves; an independent body with binding enforcement is needed.
- There must be global agreed rules on corporate advertising and public relations activities that corporations use to promote consumption and drive forward the wasteful consumerist development model that generates corporate profits but that also threatens the well being and even survival of present and future generations.